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**Gorillas transcript**

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IAN: Once you have exchanged the glance of a gorilla you change the way you think about yourself. The gorilla has seen you. And when you connect with the mind behind the eyes you will realise there is someone in there.

GRANT DENYER: These are wild eastern Molong gorillas. They are the most majestic of apes. So much like us and so long as we're quiet they don't seem to mind that we're here.

Does it still amaze you every time you see them for the first time, you know what I mean?

IAN: Yes of course it's always a thrill.

GRANT DENYER: Despite the odds, you know they're still here.

The survival of these gorillas is nothing short of a miracle.

We're in the war ravaged democratic republic of Congo, lawless, corrupt and one of the most violent places on earth.

For two decades gorillas have been killed for their meat by militia, kidnapped for the exotic animal trade by poachers and driven from their jungle homes by illegal mining. Life in the Congo, even human life is cheap.

On our way to the Kahuzi Biega National Park we travel with an armed escort for good reason. Up to 100,000 hungry and mean militia hide in the forests. On this road ten people were killed in a rebel ambush just two months ago.

LOCAL: They fired at the truck for almost ten minutes, they fired and fired and fired at the passengers.

GRANT DENYER: For what purpose?

JOHN: Really a non cause, a non cause.

GRANT DENYER: Guiding us through this wild land our chief ranger John Kahekwa who's been naming and playing with the gorillas since he was a boy and Ian Redmond who came here 33 years ago to work with the legendry gorilla searcher Diane Fossey.

IAN: When I left university and I had written a letter to Dian Fossey and to my surprise it was about six months later I got a letter back saying if you can get here we'll trial you.

GRANT DENYER: In 1985, Diane was murdered by poachers and now where gorillas are more threatened than ever, it's Ian, the UN ambassador of the year for the gorilla who's standing up for them.

IAN: The wars in the Congo have been catastrophic for the people living in the area and as a result of that, also for the wildlife in the area.

GRANT DENYER: This is the most dangerous part of the ranger's job, locating the gorillas as they fight through a toehold of patrol here in the jungle. They only have 10 percent of the park under control at the moment and the other 90 percent are gun toting rebels. So for $20 a month it's their job to stand between the gorillas and the guerrillas and extraordinary sacrifice, I just hope it's not too late.

Travelling through militia controlled territory, we stumble on an illegal mine. The great apes greatest threat. Child labourers are digging deeper into the earth for the minimal coltan which is used for the electronics in mobile phones.

Well this is where your electronics start. Most of it done illegally it's exceptionally dangerous; in fact many lives are lost in the process. As for the gorilla, well the gorilla evolution did not take into account the electronics boom or the automatic weapon.

The Congo produces 80 percent of the world's coltan, almost all of it illegally. Which finances campaigns on conflict and terror.

Now don't for a second think that this doesn't involve you or you don't have a role to play. It is quite simple, these are being killed because you need this, to make these. Every single mobile phone requires it. It's a black market business worth $220 million a year and an environment catastrophe.

At $1 a day the miners only source of protein is often bush meat like the gorillas from the national park.

ANDREA: This is Missisi, this is the newest baby.

GRANT DENYER: Chimps, baboons and monkeys are also hunted for food and the exotic animal trafficking trade.

Andrea it melts your little heart to think about what sort of existence they may have had on the black market.

ANDREA: Yeah absolutely. Look when they arrive they're usually very thin and very unhappy.

GRANT DENYER: Far from home, the Melbourne zoo keeper Andrea Edwards has been caring for rescued apes at a sanctuary near the park.

Who are these guys?

ANDREA: These are our group of juvenile chimpanzees so they range in age from about three and a half to seven years old.

GRANT DENYER: And they're here because?

ANDREA: These guys are here because they’ve all been caught up in illegal trade in Congo.

GRANT DENYER: For every baby chimp rescued there are many others killed for their meat or sold through the black market, mostly to the Middle East.

And do you hope to release them back into the wild?

ANDREA: We would love to release these animals back in the wild. The only problem is the forests of Conga aren't safe for them at the moment with rebel activity and lot's of war.

GRANT DENYER: We nearly tripped over a poachers trap. Made for an antelope they often sever the hand of a passing gorilla.

IAN: And as the gorilla just climbed down that tree, it shows you how dangerous this forest can be. Here's an old one and fortunately the natural strong in rotting. You just put their foot in there and this springs up and this catches. They usually can get away but by pulling and pulling the snare tightens around the wrist and acts like a tourniquet and cuts off the blood to the hand.

GRANT DENYER: Just 118 eastern Molong gorillas are being monitored here. They won't be safe unless the rebel forces stop the killing.

And believe it or not, what was thought to be impossible is happening. Here's the good news a lot of these men and boys were rebel soldiers until they surrendered a couple of months ago.

Now in an act of extraordinary reconciliation that may just save the gorillas, these former killers and rapists are being allowed to return home.

ISWANA: I was 12 years old.

GRANT DENYER: Looking at Iswana, he’s only 20. It's hard to believe the enormous amount of suffering that he’s seen and inflicted in his short life.

ISWANA: We used to kill people with guns. In the night we would take them up use knives or guns. We used to kill people with everything.

GRANT DENYER: As part of their rehabilitation, Iswana and the others admits their crimes against other people and the animals.

They're then given $200 to start a new life.

Back in the park there are other signs of hope. Former poachers are being turned into gang keepers, the hunters now protectors of the forest.

You can turn people around but you can turn someone who kills guerrillas for a living or for their family, you can turn them into normal park rangers.

IAN: That's right, that's right. The poacher has all the skills that a ranger needs. He knows the forest, he probably loves the forest and wants to be in the forest. You just have to switch them from killing animals to protecting animals.

An estimated 4 or 5 million people have died and it's very unusual for a news crew to be covering it. When they do cover it they just talk about the problem rather than looking at the solutions but these people here are developing and influencing themselves.

GRANT DENYER: The future of the forests will also depend on these children, the next generation. In a village in a park we find a school led by John through his conservation project called Pole, Pole.

Not only are these wonderful kids getting an education but it's even giving their enthusiastic teacher a fresh start.

She was one of the one's arrested for destroying guerrilla habitat.

You've turned her into a teacher for the community.

JOHN: Yes, now she's a school director.

GRANT DENYER: Fantastic.

JOHN: Yes.

GRANT DENYER: Doing a great job.

As we close in on the guerrilla forest, I'm given a quick lesson on ape etiquette.

IAN: When the gorillas are enjoying their food they do something "Mmmmm."

GRANT DENYER: How does it go?

IAN: It's like a two tonne float carrier. We're 38 something percent gorilla and you've got that little extra percentage.

GRANT DENYER: I'm a little bit more gorilla than the rest of us. It's not the first time someone said that!

Paolo just told us that the um gorillas are just behind this green stuff here so we've been going for three hours and I don't know about 5 kilometres. My heart's racing.

Check that out, the whole family's in the tree. Look the big fella's on the move. He's coming down. That is extraordinary! One, two, three, four, there's a little one over here, five, six.

To see them in good number, to see them happy, how does that make you feel?

JOHN: It is so beautiful and my hope is just growing up again.

GRANT DENYER: It's not too late.?

JOHN: No it's not.

GRANT DENYER: But you could die protecting the gorillas.

JOHN: Oh yes, I have to die for a noble cause. The life of the Silverback and its habitat. I can die proudly when I see the communities themselves saying "it's illegal to kill the gorilla, it's illegal to destroy its habitat." I can die proudly.